

Joint declaration on mainstreaming RRI across Horizon Europe

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Declaration

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Joint declaration on mainstreaming RRI across Horizon Europe

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ABSTRACT

Leading RRI researchers and practitioners, together with policymakers and stakeholder organisations, discussed the state-of-the-art and future perspectives for RRI at the 'Pathways to Transformation' conference in June 2019, an event which was extended beyond Brussels, for instance by ca. 330 original tweets and ca. 840 retweets from ca. 160 unique accounts. In the conference, many participants expressed their concern about an uncertain future for RRI in the EC. As a result, numerous large-scale EU-funded RRI projects signed a *Joint Declaration*¹, urging the European Commission to make RRI a key objective of the upcoming framework programme, Horizon Europe – a plea to both mainstream the approach across the programme and provide specific resources for strengthening the RRI knowledge base. As the Horizon Europe programme is being forged, it is timely to present the Declaration for a broader audience.

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RRI; responsible research; mainstreaming; science policy; Horizon Europe; science with and for society

The future of responsible research and innovation (RRI) in 'Horizon Europe'

The continued relevance of RRI

Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) is the on-going process of aligning research and innovation to societal values, needs and expectations. With the early political adoption of RRI, the European Union has been a pioneer in responding to the issues at stake; most prominently the need for public legitimacy and support for research and innovation actions that address real societal needs in a way that respects the values of European

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publics. Throughout the last three European framework programmes, and most importantly in the Science-with-and-for-Society (SwafS) programme, ground-breaking conceptual and practical work on RRI has been achieved. Remarkable change processes have been initiated; signalling a potential deeper institutionalisation of RRI principles and practices into organisations and national level policies.

We, the signatories to this Declaration, see the value of the RRI concept continuing to unfold best in the future when a top-down political approach is wisely operationalised into criteria for funding under the next European framework programme Horizon Europe, and when this approach is combined with further nurturing of the individual capacities of us all, the actors in research and innovation, in order to better address societal concerns regarding research and innovation. The European Union is the right actor to take a leading position in responsibility in research and innovation as the EU has been built on values from the very beginning and its success – now more than ever – depends on how it can deliver on its core values such as well-being, social coherence and sustainability. Previous initiatives, such as the Rome Declaration on Responsible Research and Innovation in Europe, have highlighted the importance of RRI. Such initiatives have not lost any of their urgency, which is why we, the signatories to this Declaration, call for immediate action.

The threat of dilution of RRI in Horizon Europe

Institutional change is slow and requires dedication and nurturing, along with continued funding. The progress that has been achieved is now under threat in the impending Horizon Europe framework programme, which does not foresee a follow-up to SwafS. RRI still figures in the important basic political discussions in the regulation for Horizon Europe and will likely still have a place in the programme. However, its implementation in future EC R&I policy remains uncertain. At this time, when institutional change actions are starting to gain momentum, a dilution of the RRI agenda would work against reaping the benefits of the large investments – rightly – made.

Our call: make RRI a substantial and living element of Horizon Europe

Responsible Europe should strengthen its efforts to focus on responsible and sustainable modes of research and innovation. We, therefore, call on European Institutions, EU Member States and their R&I Funding and Performing Organisations, business and civil society to continue to make Responsible Research and Innovation a central objective, with appropriate budgets, across all relevant policies and activities. We also call on such institutions to continue to support the democratisation of research and innovation ecosystems, fostering more responsive and inclusive modes of knowledge production and diffusion.

Our active contribution: working jointly for infrastructure for RRI

The signatories to this Declaration are ready to assist in creating a more inclusive, open and responsive culture of research and innovation through, among other actions, implementing RRI in Horizon Europe; being the allies of policy actors, including DG RTD staff, in the embedding of RRI. As a community, we want to actively push forward a self-organised hub and learning platform, ideally with support for this endeavour from the EC. If

RRI related actions are mainstreamed in Horizon Europe, it is crucial that such mainstreaming is done with a view to high quality and not just included as a tick-box activity.

Advice to the European Commission regarding embedding of RRI in Horizon Europe

- (1) In cases in which RRI or RRI related concepts are included in research and innovation actions, applicants in these programmes/calls should be asked to outline how their projects relate to RRI, based on guidelines for how to embed RRI effectively and how to measure societal impact. The proper inclusion of RRI actions must involve specified tasks, deliverables, milestones and budgets in order to be convincing. If the described RRI actions are not designed systematically, this should affect the overall evaluation significantly. Criteria for assessing this, both in the proposal and in subsequent delivery, should be communicated to applicants, evaluators and reviewers.
- (2) Interdisciplinary collaboration should be encouraged. Including researchers from Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) can increase the quality of RRI actions, such as citizen engagement or ethical deliberation. Including other initiatives and organisations (e.g. TA and NGOs) can also have an important function in making projects more transdisciplinary.
- (3) Treat RRI measures in integrated projects as research (e.g. stakeholder engagement, citizen science, co-creation), based on an understanding of how such actions can be done well, and the methods and results of RRI actions should be published. Only in this way can continuous further development, quality improvement and learning effects be achieved.
- (4) Projects should consider integrating all aspects of RRI; simply picking one aspect (e.g. research integrity) is to fragment RRI. Instead, when applying, for instance, citizen science in an integrated project this should be done in a reflective, inclusive and open way.
- (5) It must be clear that citizen science, open science and co-creation are aspects of RRI, but responsibility in research and innovation also includes being anticipatory, inclusive, reflexive and responsive, and includes considerations of fairness (social, gender, etc.) and sustainability. Funding calls that include RRI, should be informed by evidence from past research. Specific guidelines to include open science, citizen science and co-creation activities in Horizon Europe should be related to RRI.
- (6) A hub on RRI should be funded by the EC in order to ensure the quality in its mainstreaming, co-creation, public engagement and citizen science. This hub should build on and further cultivate the RRI knowledge base. It should advise, train, consult, assess and provide quality control and be a resource for those who include RRI-related activities in Horizon Europe. It should also provide experts for the assessment of these aspects of proposals and project activities, and for relevant committees and boards.
- (7) The different advisory boards and committees in Horizon Europe, especially in relation to emerging science and technologies, as well as the mission-oriented programmes, should include competence in RRI, or at least transdisciplinary competence (including civil society representatives). In the further operationalisation of Horizon Europe's mission-oriented approach, RRI should be viewed as integral.

Note

1. <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/responsible-research-innovation>

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributor

Professor Alexander Gerber is Programme Director for Science Communication at Germany's international Rhine-Waal University, and Research Director of the extramural Institute for Science and Innovation Communication (inscico). Before returning to academia, the scientific entrepreneur was the founder and editor-in-chief of InnoVisions Magazine, and Head of Marketing & Communications at Fraunhofer (ICT) for seven years. Professor Gerber is an information scientist by training. The spectrum of his research crosses what is often seen as the divide between scholarship and practice, working towards science communication as an agent of social innovation and social justice. The vision: science and innovation co-producing knowledge with their stakeholders, in a responsible, inclusive and sustainable way. This work is guided by a trans-cultural, comparative approach, focusing on the global diversity of challenges and solutions. As of March 2020, this work includes work package leadership in four EU Horizon 2020 projects. Together with other international partners, he has been running Europe's largest Summer School for Science Communication since 2016. Professor Gerber is an elected member of the Scientific Committee of PCST, the World Association of Science Communication. He also serves on several Advisory Boards, and as an elected member of the Governing Board of EuroScience and its ESOF Supervisory Board since 2010.

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